



# WASHINGTON HANCOCK COMMUNITY AGENCY

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Testimony  
USDA Farm Bill Forum  
October 11, 2005  
Bangor, ME

I offer the following written comments in consideration of the next Farm Bill. I can address some of the six questions in this forum as my work and that of my colleagues in the Down East Business Alliance Division (DBA) of the Washington Hancock Community Agency (WHCA) affords us the opportunity to work closely with rural micro-entrepreneurs, including farmers and food producers, in eastern Maine.

In fact, we are in partnership with the town of Bucksport to develop the Penobscot Bay Commercial Kitchen (PBCK). The PBCK is a shared-use commercial kitchen that will serve as a business incubator to provide the needed resources for entrepreneurs to start and/or grow a specialty food business; to strengthen the region's agricultural community by assisting in the development of value-added products; and to provide on-going technical assistance for these food producers. Our target market for this proposed project includes farmers and food producers in Hancock, Waldo, Penobscot, and Knox counties in Maine.

In regard to question #3 about effective and fair distribution of assistance, as Maine does not grow the crops (at least not to scale) most closely associated with mega farming operations, I'd like to see more money directed to progressive policies that will focus on beginning farmers, small farms, rural development, and farmland conservation.

Specifically, and this recommendation ties in with what I will offer for comments on questions #5 and #6 as well, I'd like to see the Specialty Crop Grants funded. In 2002, the Maine Department of Agriculture was able to widely distribute these funds in the state to grower groups, the University of Maine Cooperative Extension, and other organizations helping Maine farmers. Some of it was used to promote Maine foods and farm products. It would be appropriate for the PBCK to ask the Dept of Ag for help in our efforts to assist farmers and food producers if this money was available.

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*people helping people*

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In regard to question #5 about how Federal rural and farm programs can provide effective assistance, I believe that a key to rural revitalization in Maine is greater investment in entrepreneurship. The next Farm Bill should include more investment in it. The next Farm Bill might establish and fund a rural micro enterprise program within USDA to make grants to intermediary organizations to support small business entrepreneurship.

These grants could support loans, technical assistance, training, and other initiatives. For example, support is needed to develop rural small business networks for marketing.

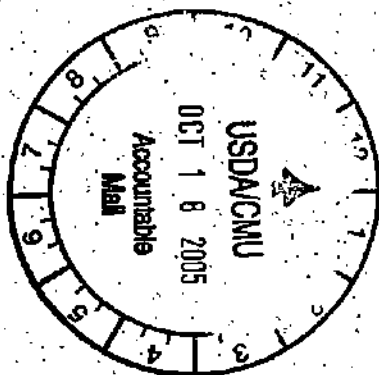
And, again, in regard to question #6 and how the next Farm Bill can address agricultural product development, marketing, and research-related issues, I believe we should invest in entrepreneurship within agriculture. There are future opportunities in market niches for Maine-made products where consumers are willing to pay premium prices for unique products produced in ways that they support.

In addition to considering new funding to this end, it might be beneficial to restore previous levels of funding to programs like USDA Value Added Producer Grants or the Initiative for Future Farm and Food Systems. It is my understanding that these programs are designed to support entrepreneurial small farms, but that their funding has been cut by 60-70%.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit my thoughts on this matter.

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